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Bum:
File

Mr. McGeorge Bundy
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mac:

I have given a great deal of thought to our conversations of some weeks ago. The more I have reflected about them, the clearer it has become that I should not come to Washington for the summer as we had discussed.

When the President asked me to join the White House staff, it seemed to me a unique opportunity to be of service at a time of national crisis. For many reasons I could not accept a full-time position immediately. But I did give up all other consulting arrangements in order to free as much time as possible for whatever requests might come from the White House. You may recall also that I offered in my letter of March 1st to work practically full-time between May 15th and September 1st.

Still, after careful consideration, I have come to the conclusion that under present circumstances I can make a contribution as effectively as an ad hoc consultant. Let me explain my reasons.

There are essentially two ways in which an outsider can contribute to the policy making process. One is to furnish new ideas. The other is to help in developing a sense of proportion and direction. Of these, the latter seems to me by far the more important, even though the former is most frequently demanded. In an Administration containing such an unusual number of talented people, it would be amazing if any one person could come up with an idea no one had conceived before. Great disasters with irremedial penalties or enormous successes based on individual moves are rare indeed in foreign policy. Much more frequently the difference between success and failure is a nuance. An erroneous policy usually begins as only a minor deviation from what would have been correct. The real need, therefore, seems to me to lie in the relationship of measures to each other and in timing.

Mr. McGeorge Bundy

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I am convinced that in order to make a real contribution, I must be able to follow a given problem or a set of problems over a period of time. If I am to serve as an idea man, I will see the papers only when they are well advanced and usually with very little time for study. For example, it is next to impossible to make a significant contribution to, say, the NSC NATO paper when I have only an afternoon to read the document and prepare my comments. My uneasiness about certain features of our foreign policy, therefore, is bound to express itself in comments which must seem peripheral and irritating to those who have been participating in generating the policy papers. It is like being asked in the middle of a chess game to suggest a move without having been in a position to study the development of the game or being allowed to explain the rationale for the suggestion.

In this context, I do not feel that my physical presence is required in Washington at this time. Henry Owen has been assigned responsibility for NATO and Berlin. Carl Kaysen has been charged with following military policy. You explained to me that only permanent staff members could work in the area of military policy. I can appreciate your difficulty in finding an assignment for someone who proposes to join the staff on a temporary basis. However, since the subjects to which I have given the greatest professional attention are already being covered, I would be coming to Washington almost for the sake of being there.

I fully understand that in the week of preparing the President's trip overseas you could not be expected to concentrate on the problem of fitting one man into your staff for a period of a few months. Moreover, no Administration has faced a more cruel challenge than has this one: to reorganize the government, to give it a new direction and to deal with one of the great revolutions of history, while all the omissions of the past decade have to be compensated for at once. I am only too aware of the almost inhuman pressures that this process generates. I would genuinely like to be of help and of course remain available for consultation. Finally, you can always count on my moral support and my good wishes.

Kind regards.

Sincerely yours,


Henry A. Kissinger